

Pīti Sutta

The Discourse on Zest

[Lay followers, too, should go into solitary retreat]

(Āṅuttara Nikāya 5.176/3:206-208)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2005

1 Psychological and moral levels of feelings

An uninstructed worldling (that is, one unskilled in the Dharma) would experience the following “mood swings” between pleasure and pain, on a psychological level (sense-desire) and a moral level (the unwholesome and the wholesome):

	<u>Physical</u>	<u>Mental</u>
Sense-desire	physical pain	mental pain
Sense-desire	physical pleasure	mental pleasure
The unwholesome	physical pain	mental pain
The unwholesome	physical pleasure	mental pleasure
The wholesome	physical pain	mental pain

However, the uninstructed ordinary worldling would never experience the pleasure (physical and mental) of the wholesome mind, which is attained only through the joy of a focussed mind.

The Sall’atthēna Sutta (S 36.6) explains how the psychological level of affective experiences work. The uninstructed worldling¹ reacts to a sense-experience by lusting after a pleasurable feeling (*sukha, vedanā*), or by showing aversion towards a painful feeling (*dukkha, vedanā*), or simply by not understanding a neutral one (*adukkham-asukha vedanā*). And so these feelings are yoked to him, reinforcing his latent tendencies (*anusaya*).

The noble disciple, on the other hand, does not sorrow nor show aversion nor feel confused towards a painful feeling. Similarly, he does not delight in a pleasurable feeling, but sees its impermanent nature. And he also understands the impermanent nature of neutral feelings. Since he responds skillfully to these three kinds of feeling, none of them are yoked to him: they simply arise and fall away, without remaining in him. Moreover he is neither attracted to pleasurable feelings nor averse to painful feelings because he “knows an escape other than sensual pleasure,”² that is, the joy of seclusion (as mentioned here in the Pīti Sutta).

On a moral level, the uninstructed ordinary worldling faces the bitter fruits of his karma because his unwholesome deeds are the conditions for their fruition. **The Sall’atthēna Sutta** (S 36.6), goes on to speak of how he experiences two kinds of pain, both the physical and the mental. The noble disciple however only notices such feelings in the body, but his mind is unmoved by them.³

2 Spiritual solitude for laity

Until recently (even up to the late 20th century), there is a common wrong view that spiritual training, especially mental cultivation or meditation, is only the domain of the monastic. The laity merely makes merit by serving and supporting the monastics. However, it is clear from the Pīti Sutta here that spiritual development by way of *mental cultivation is just as important for the laity*.

The Buddha and the early monastics regularly went into solitary retreat (*paṭisallāna*), that is, at least twice a day: once at dawn, and again at dusk.⁴ A number of suttas—**the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33),⁵ **the**

¹ S 36.6/4:207 f = SD 5.5.

² S 36.6/4:209 f = SD 5.5.

³ S 36.6/4:207-210 = SD 5.5. For the various types of suffering, see **Dhamma, cakka-p, pavattana S** (S 56.11) = SD 1.1.

⁴ DhA 1:319.

Niddasa,vatthu Sutta (A 7.18)⁶ and **the (Sāriputta) Niddasa,vatthu Sutta** (A 7.39)⁷—mention the keen devotion to solitude (*paṭisallāne tibba,chando*) as one of the seven grounds for commendation (*niddasa vatthu*), which are, namely:

- (1) the keen devotion to undertake the training, and the unrelenting love for such a devotion;
- (2) the keen devotion to making a careful observation of phenomena, and the unrelenting love for such a devotion;
- (3) the keen devotion to pushing away desires, and the unrelenting love for such a devotion;
- (4) **the keen devotion to spiritual solitude**, and the unrelenting love for such a devotion;
- (5) the keen devotion to putting forth effort, and the unrelenting love for such a devotion;
- (6) the keen devotion to mindfulness and mental discrimination, and the unrelenting love for such a devotion;
- (7) the keen devotion to the penetrating of views,⁸ and the unrelenting love for such a devotion.

Here we have the proper context for the practice of solitude, that is, for the development of insight leading to spiritual liberation, that is, the attainment of sainthood. These seven ground for commendation, in fact, are a comprehensive statement of the threefold training (*ti,sikkhā*). Moral training (*sīla,sikkhā*) is covered by (1) and (2); mental training (*samādhi,sikkhā*), by (3)-(5); training in wisdom (*paññā,sikkhā*), by (6); and attaining the path of sainthood, by (7).

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⁵ D 33.2.3.(7)/3:252.

⁶ A 7.18/4:15 = SD 19.9.

⁷ A 7.39.4/4:36 = SD 19.10.

⁸ Comy: *magga,dassane*, “a vision of the path” (DA 3:1040 = AA 4:9)

The Discourse on Zest

(A 5.176/3:206-208)

1 Then the householder Anātha,piṇḍika surrounded by some five hundred laymen approached the Blessed One and saluted him. Having saluted the Blessed One, they sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, the Blessed One addressed the householder Anātha,piṇḍika thus:

The Buddha's admonition

2 “Householders, you support the order of monks with robes, almsfood, lodging, and medicine and support for the sick. But, householders, you should not merely content yourself with supporting the order of monks with robes, almsfood, lodging, and medicine and support for the sick.

Therefore, householders, you should train yourselves thus: [207]

3 ‘What now,⁹ we should from time to time attain and dwell in the zest of solitude.¹⁰

Thus, householders, you should train yourselves.”

Sāriputta's admonition

4a When this was said, the venerable Sāriputta said this to the Blessed One:

“Wonderful, venerable sir! Marvellous, venerable sir! How well, venerable sir, this has been spoken by the Blessed One, thus:

‘Householders, you support the order of monks with robes, almsfood, lodging, and medicine and support for the sick. But, householders, you should not merely content yourself with supporting the order of monks with robes, almsfood, lodging, and medicine and support for the sick.

Therefore, householders, you should train yourselves thus:

“What now, we should from time to time attain and dwell in the zest of solitude.”

Thus, householders, you should train yourselves.’

4b Venerable sir, whenever¹¹ householders attain and dwell in the zest of solitude,¹² five states do not occur:

(1) Whatever physical pain or mental displeasure there is, connected with sense-desire, it does not arise on that occasion.

(2) Whatever physical pleasure or mental pleasure there is, connected with sense-desire, it does not arise on that occasion.

(3) Whatever physical pain or mental displeasure there is, connected with the unwholesome, it does not arise on that occasion.

(4) Whatever physical pleasure or mental pleasure there is, connected with the unwholesome, it does not arise on that occasion.¹³

(5) Whatever physical pain or mental displeasure there is, connected with the wholesome, it does not arise on that occasion.”¹⁴

The Buddha's approval

5 “Sadhu, sadhu, Sāriputta! Whenever householders attain and dwell in the zest of solitude, five states do not occur:

⁹ *Kinti*. Comy glosses as *kena nāma upāyena*, “by what means?”

¹⁰ *Kinti mayam kālena kālam pavivekam pītim upasampajja vihāreyyāma ti*.

¹¹ “Whenever,” *yasmim...* *samaye*, alt tr “on that occasion.”

¹² Comy: The zest (*pīti*) here arises in dependence on the first and the second dhyanas (AA 3:303).

¹³ Comy gives the example here of how a hunter might shoot a deer or a boar with an arrow, and miss, and so become depressed [mental displeasure]; or he may hit and kill one, and be glad [mental pleasure]. (AA 3:303)

¹⁴ That is to say, only *wholesome* physical and mental pleasure arise for him. See Intro (1).

(1) Whatever physical pain or mental displeasure there is, connected with sense-desire, it does not arise on that occasion.

(2) Whatever physical pleasure or mental pleasure there is, connected with sense-desire, it does not arise on that occasion.

(3) Whatever physical pain or mental displeasure there is, connected with the unwholesome, it does not arise on that occasion.

(4) Whatever physical pleasure or mental pleasure there is, connected with the unwholesome, it does not arise on that occasion.

(5) Whatever physical pain or mental displeasure there is, connected with the wholesome, it does not arise on that occasion.

Sāriputta, whenever a noble disciple attains and dwells in the zest of solitude, these five states do not occur.”

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